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**In the claims:**

1. (currently amended) A stringed instrument comprising:  
a solid body having [-a] exposed front [surface] and [-a] rear  
[surface] surfaces;  
a tuning mechanism;  
a neck having one end joined to said body and an opposite end retaining said  
tuning mechanism;  
a retainer block distinct from and encompassed by said rear surface; and  
a plurality of strings each having a first end secured to said tuning  
mechanism; and a second end retained by said retainer block.
2. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 including a bridge  
mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning  
mechanism, over said bridge, and through said body to said block.
3. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 2 wherein said  
retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of  
channels extending between said inner and outer surfaces, and each of said strings  
passes through a different one of said channels.
4. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 3 wherein said second  
ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

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5. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 4 wherein each of said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second ends.

6. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 wherein said block is unitary and made of brass.

7. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 6 including a bridge mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning mechanism, over said bridge, and through said body to said block.

**8. (original)** A stringed instrument according to claim 7 wherein said retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of channels extending between said inner and outer surfaces, each of said strings passes through a different one of said channels.

9. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 8 wherein said second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

10. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 9 wherein each of said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second ends.

11. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 3 wherein said body defines a cavity retaining said block and intersecting said rear surface.

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12. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

13. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 12 wherein each of said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second ends.

14. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said block is unitary and made of brass.

15. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 14 wherein said second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

16. (original) A stringed instrument according to claim 15 wherein each of said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second ends.